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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the process by which school consultants select the teachers with whom they consult. Research participants were 14 certificate or doctoral matriculants in a school psychology program. A questionnaire was adminstered to all consultants consisting of ranking and rating items. Consultants were asked to: (1) list all the teachers in their consultation placement; (2) to name in rank order the two teachers they perceived as best meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of children and the two teachers perceived as worst meeting these needs; (3) to name the two teachers most receptive to change and the two teachers least receptive to change; (4) to name the two teachers for whom they had the most personal liking and the two teachers for whom they had the least personal liking; and (5) to rate the most preferred teacher-consultee and the least preferred teacher-consultee on a nine-point scale in comparison with the other teachers in their placement school. The data indicate that the consultants most prefer to work with teachers who are classified as most able to meet socio-emotional needs of children, most receptive to change, and most likeable. It appears that the teachers most in need of assistance are not selected for consultation. (MM)

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TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AND THE SELECTION OF TEACHERS AS CONSULTEES

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Teacher Characteristics and the Selection of Teachers as Consultees

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Traditional psychodiagnosis and psychotherapy have been criticized for serving a limited number of people and frequently neglecting those most in need of help. In order to serve a larger population of children and problems, mental health consultation to schools has developed (Alpert, 1976). Mental health consultation is the process in which the mental health professional assists another, called the consultee, regarding clients for whom the consultee has responsibility. In school, the clients are students, while the consultees are teachers, administrators, aides, or other school staff.

Often the consultant assigned to a school district cannot work with the entire school system staff. Instead, consultants must concentrate their services on a small group within a school or a group of schools within a system. What are the differences between those teachers and systems consultants select to consult with, and those they do not? Although this area of study has not been considered in the consultation literature, the psychotherapy literature suggests that psychotherapists prefer to treat patients with particular qualities and characteristics. Specifically, therapists prefer working with those who are the least disturbed, are in the least need of treatment, and with whom the "best" therapeutic results may be obtained (Garfield, 1971). Do consultants have similar preferences?

The present study focuses on the process by which school consultants select the teachers with whom they consult. A major hypothesis of this research was that consultants

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would select as teacher-consultees those teachers whom they perceived as better able to meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of children. Secondary hypotheses were that consultants would select as teacher consultees those teachers whom they perceived as more receptive to consultation and whom they liked most.

Method

Research Participants

Research participants were student consultants, 14 female graduate students and one male graduate student enrolled in a year long practicum course in school consultation. All students were certificate or doctoral matriculants in a school psychology program, and were in the equivalent of their second or third year of training. All students had teaching or other field work experience in schools prior to the course. The student consultants were assigned to a school for purposes of training and service as mental health consultants. Twelve of the 15 consultants were assigned to one of five Catholic elementary or high schools serving an urban middle or low-middle class population. The remaining three consultants were in non-Catholic elementary or day care settings.

Procedure

Before completing the research questionnaire the consultants had visited their school placements from six to twelve times for a minimum of three hours per visit. During these visits they observed in classrooms and talked to principal and teachers in order to better understand the school.

The questionnaire was administered to all consultants by the consultation course instructor during course time. The consultants were told that the purpose of the questionnaire was to learn more about how mental health consultants select teachers with whom to work.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was devised for purposes of the present study. It consists of ranking and rating items. For the ranking items, student consultants were asked to list all the teachers in their consultation placement. Then they were requested to name in

rank order: the two teachers they perceived as best meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of children, and the two teachers perceived as worst at meeting these needs; the two teachers perceived as most receptive to change and the two teachers perceived as least receptive to change; the two teachers for whom they had the most personal liking, and the two teachers for whom they had the least personal liking.

For the rating items, student consultants were asked to name the teacher with whom they would most like to consult and the teacher with whom they would least like to consult. They were then asked to rate these two teachers on nine five-point rating scales. The student consultants were asked to compare the most and the least prefered teachers with other teachers in the school on the following nine dimensions: with regard to the teacher's lessons, (1) the clarity of lessons from the child's perspective, (2) the organization of lessons, (3) the degree of stimulation of lessons; with regard to the teacher's response to children, (4) her sensitivity, (5) her supportiveness, (6) her approachableness; and with regard to the teacher's expected response to consultation, (7) her interest in consultation, (8) her approachableness, (9) her openness to changing her behavior.

Six items, three each concerning teacher's lessons and teacher's response to children were developed because mental health consultation usually involves issues around teacher's lessons and teacher's response to children. The third category, teacher's expected response to consultation, was added in order to further the understanding of teacher-consultee selection.

Results

The ranking data concerning the frequencies that most and least preferred teachers are listed as the two best and two worst on the three dimensions (ability to meet socio-emotional needs of children, receptivity to change, likeability) was analyzed by means of three chi-square tests. The frequency that the three most and three least preferred teachers are classified as most able, neither most nor least able, or least able is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Teachers were classified as most and least able if a consultant listed his/her most preferred or least preferred as one of the two best or two worst teachers with respect to meeting academic and socio-emotional needs of children respectively. Those most and least preferred teachers who were not listed as one of the two best or two worst were classified in the middle category, neither most nor least able. A similar classification procedure was used for the other two dimensions, receptivity to change and likeability. The chi-square test indicates that consultant's preference and teacher's ability to meet socio-emotional needs of children, according to the consultant's perception are dependent ($X^2 = 9.97$; $p < .01$). Post hoc analyses were done to determine which of the classifications were used significantly more with one group. Contrasts indicate that significantly more most preferred teachers were classified most able while significantly more least preferred teachers were classified least able (Miller, 1967). The frequency that the three most and three least preferred teachers are classified as most receptive, neither most nor least receptive, and least receptive is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The chi-square test results indicates that consultant's preference and teacher's receptibility to change, according to the consultant's perception, are dependent ($X^2 = 25.4$; $p < .001$). Contrasts indicate that significantly more most preferred teachers were classified most receptive while significantly more least preferred teachers were classified least receptive.

Lastly, the frequency that the three most and least preferred teachers are classified as most likeable, neither most nor least likeable, and least likeable is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Dependence between consultants preference and likeability of teacher, according to the consultant, is indicated by the chi-square test results ($X^2 = 21.02$; $p < .001$). Contrasts indicate that significantly more most preferred teachers were classified most likeable while significantly more least preferred teachers were classified least likeable.

The rating data, concerning ratings of single most preferred and single least preferred

teachers on nine dimensions, were analyzed by means of the correlated t test. The mean ratings are presented in Table 4. The lower the mean presented in the table, the more favorable the rating.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 4 indicates that most preferred consultees, in comparison to least preferred consultees, were perceived as more stimulating in their lesson presentation, more sensitive to children, and more supportive to children. These three correlated t tests are significant at the .05 level for one-tailed tests. In addition, compared to least preferred consultees, most preferred consultees were perceived as more interested in consultation, more approachable by the consultant, and more open to changing behavior ($p < .001$). Although the direction of difference for the remaining three dimensions indicate more favorable ratings for the most preferred teachers, these differences are not significant.

Discussion

The data indicate that the three teachers consultants most prefer to work with are classified as most able to meet socio-emotional needs of children, most receptive to children, and most likeable, while those three teachers consultants least prefer to work with are classified as least able to meet socio-emotional needs of children, least receptive to change, and least likeable. Further, the ranking data obtained early in the questionnaire are consistent with the rating data which indicate that student consultants prefer as consultees those teachers perceived as interested in consultation, approachable by the consultant, and open to changing behavior. In addition, most preferred consultees are perceived as more stimulating in lesson presentation, more sensitive to children, and more supportive to children. Further, although the difference was not significant, the data indicate the following trend: that most preferred consultees, in contrast to least preferred consultees, teach lessons which are clear and organized and are more approachable by children. In summary then, consultants, like therapists, choose to work with those who they believe will be most responsive to the intervention efforts and who, in general, are less needy of assistance around child and lesson issues. In general,

consultants in the present study did not select teachers on the basis of teacher's need for assistance concerning lessons or children.

The sample provides one explanation for the finding that consultants select to work with teachers who are more receptive to and less needy of consultation. Consultants in the present study were students. Although course grading as well as inexperience in the role of consultant may serve as additional motivators for wanting a successful consultation school experience, it should be noted that student consultants were aware that grades would be based on richness of conceptualization rather than success of intervention. Further, student consultants in the present study occupied a number of professional roles in schools prior to the course, and were therefore more experienced that the role "student" would suggest.

A second possible explanation for the findings is that consultants want to experience success and therefore choose to work with those most likely to respond, at least initially. Or perhaps they choose to work with the "better" teachers, as the present study indicates, because changes in "good" teachers is more highly valued than changes of the same numerical size at lower levels of teaching. That change is more highly regarded at higher levels of functioning has been found by Mintz, (1972) and Rogers, Gendlin, Kielsler & Truax, (1967) in their studies of psychotherapists.

Since consulting with one consultee limits a consultant's professional time and energy to consult with other consultees, the preentry issues of with whom will we consult needs to be carefully conceptualized and, as Cherniss (1976) suggests, has not been systematically considered. Although Argyris (1970) and Caplan (1970) have shared their conceptualizations, there is little empirical research concerning which consultee characteristics are important in the selection of consultees in order to maximize effect.

What is clear from the present study is that consultant perception of the teacher's difficulty in meeting children's academic and socio-emotional needs did not result in consultee selection. The present data suggests that we are not assisting those teachers who are most in need of help. If there were empirical data documenting that teachers most needy around child and lesson issues profitted less from consultation, then the failure to select teachers most in need of assistance would be understandable.

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Table 1

Classification of Most and Least Preferred Teachers
On Ability to Meet Socio-Emotional Needs of Children

Classification	Teachers[a]		X^2
	Most Preferred	Least Preferred	
1. Most Able	11	6	9.97*
2. Neither Most nor Least Able	29	22	
3. Least Able	5	17	
	45	45	

* $p < .01$

[a] "most preferred" and "least preferred" refers to the three teachers each consultant listed as most and least preferred respectively.

Table 2

Classification of Most and Least Preferred Teachers
On Receptivity to Change

Classification	Teachers[a] Most Preferred	Least Preferred	X^2
1. Most Receptive	20	1	25.4*
2. Neither Most nor Least Receptive	21	28	
3. Least Receptive	4	16	
	45	45	

* $p < .001$

[a] "most perferred" and "least preferred" refers to the three teachers each consultant listed as most and least preferred respectively.

Table 3

Classification of Most and Least Preferred Teachers
On Likeability

Classification	Teachers[a] Most Preferred	Least Preferred	X^2
1. Most Likeable	18	2	21.02*
2. Neither Most nor Least Likeable	23	26	
3. Least Likeable	4	17	
	45	45	

* $p < .001$

[a] "most preferred" and "least preferred" refers to the three tsachers each consultant listed as most and least preferred respectively.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations of Difference, and Correlated t Values For Differences in Ratings Between Most Preferred and Least Preferred Teacher-Consultees

Categories	Mean for Group		Correlated t	
	Most Preferred	Least Preferred	SD of Difference	t
Lessons				
Lesson Clarity	2.53	2.64	1.33	-.19
Lesson Organization	2.46	2.71	1.26	-.64
Lesson Stimulation	2.73	3.71	1.51	-2.12*
Response to Children				
Sensitivity to Children	2.16	3.17	1.70	-2.18**
Supportive to Children	2.36	3.30	1.54	-2.06*
Approachable by Children	2.43	3.54	1.91	-1.74
Response to Consultation				
Interest in Consultation	2.00	4.17	1.10	-6.90**
Approachable by Consultant	2.00	3.61	1.16	-4.88**
Openness to Changing Behavior	2.60	4.32	1.06	-6.23**

Note. The lower the mean, the more favorable the rating.

*$p < .05$, for one-tailed test.

**$p < .001$, for one-tailed test.